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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VIENNA 002608

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STATE FOR INR/I, INR/EU, INL, EUR/PPG, EUR/AGS, AND EUR/SCE

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TAGS: [PINR](#) [SNAR](#) [AU](#)

SUBJECT: C-CN5-00226: ALBANIAN CRIMINAL GROUPS IN AUSTRIA

REF: STATE 81736

Classified By: ACTING ECONOMIC-POLITICAL COUNSELOR MICHAEL DE TAR

REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#). (C) Below is Post's response to C-CN5-00226 on Albanian organized crime.

[2](#). (C) What is the nature and extent of Albanian organized criminal activity in Austria?

-- Post's information on ethnic Albanian organized crime elements operating in Austria derives largely from its Austrian law enforcement contacts. According to these GoA sources, organized criminal activity by ethnic Albanians is increasing in Austria. In its 2004 annual report, the Austrian Ministry of Interior's Criminal Intelligence Unit reported that "Albania and Kosovo are gaining in importance as depositories and as operations bases for shipments of heroin to the EU." Austria is a transit country for drug trafficking originating primarily along the historic Balkan Route and, according to the Austrian Criminal Intelligence Unit, organized criminal elements from Albania and Kosovo are actively involved in heroin smuggling along this route.

-- According to information from the Austrian Federal Criminal Investigation Service (Bundeskriminalamt or BKA), Albanian drug traffickers are known to recruit ethnic Albanians or Austrian citizens of Albanian descent living in Austria to transport heroin and other illicit drugs through Austria. The individuals recruited often have vehicles with Austrian or EU license plates, which are usually not scrutinized as intently by Austrian and EU border authorities as vehicles with non-EU license plates. DEA Vienna's BKA colleagues report that, as in other European countries, ethnic Albanians in Austria often operate in a tightly knit community and rely closely on relatives to staff command and control operations within their criminal organizations. In addition, BKA notes that ethnic Albanian and Turkish narcotics traffickers often work closely together.

-- Note: Albania is not in the Embassy Vienna Legatt's area of responsibility, and Albania only came under the area of responsibility for the Department of Homeland Security office at Embassy Vienna in May 2005. Embassy Vienna's Drug Enforcement Agency office continues to have a strong and active relationship with its Austrian counterparts, but only

a small fraction of DEA's joint cases with Austria in 2004 and 2005 involved ethnic Albanians.

-- In July 2005, Embassy Vienna's Legatt office hosted a one day seminar for Austrian law enforcement officials in Vienna. The theme of this year's seminar, at Austria's request, was Albanian organized crime. Post's Legatt office brought in FBI experts from the U.S. and Europe to discuss trends and patterns in Albanian organized criminal activity in the United States, including how these groups finance their activities and launder money.

13. (U) Have there been any notable criminal cases in Austria involving ethnic Albanian criminal elements?

-- In March 2005, Austrian police, in cooperation with Czech and German law enforcement officials, detained two members of a drug trafficking ring headed by an ethnic Albanian, according to press reporting. The traffickers were involved in transporting cocaine from the Netherlands to Austria and the Czech Republic.

-- In October 2004, Austrian police in Salzburg disrupted a Kosovo-based narcotics network, according to press reporting. This resulted in 17 arrests and the confiscation of 170 kg of heroin worth an estimated twelve million euros.

-- In June 2004, according to press, law enforcement officials from Austria, DEA, and several other European countries cooperated in a police investigation in which Slovak authorities arrested an Albanian cocaine trafficker. The trafficker was one of the main organizers of a network that imported cocaine from South American into Slovakia.

14. (U) What is the nature and extent of Austrian and Albanian Government cooperation on crime and crime-related issues?

-- Austria is politically and economically active in Albania, and continues to strengthen its bilateral ties to Albania. In April 2005, Albanian Foreign Minister Kastriot Islami made his first official visit to Austria and met with Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik. During the visit, Plassnik stated in the press that Albania's future "lies within the European Union." During their meeting, Plassnik also stressed the need for further progress on implementing reforms in Albania in order to establish the rule of law and a "sound" judiciary system, and to fight organized crime and corruption. Austria, through its leadership of the EU's CARDS (Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilization) project in the judiciary sector, is also providing assistance to Albania for training police in criminal investigation procedures.

-- In June 2005, Austrian Interior Minister Liese Prokop met with Albanian Interior Minister Igli Toska in Austria to

discuss the fight against illicit trafficking and organized crime. The two ministers exchanged information on Albanian organized crime groups operating illegally in Austria, according to press reporting. The ministers also discussed the possibility of setting up joint working groups and other ways to increase cooperation in identifying and fighting Albanian organized crime.

-- The Western Balkans and the fight against organized crime and corruption will be key themes of the Austrian EU Presidency from January to July 2006. Post will continue to report on developments in these areas.

van Voorst